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SUBJECT: LIBERIA: PRESIDENT SIRLEAF DISSOLVES MAYORAL TASK FORCE,
APOLOGIZES TO MUSLIMS

REF: A) MONROVIA 483 B) MONROVIA 134

1. (SBU) SUMMARY. President Ellen Johnson Sirleaf has dissolved a task force headed by Acting Monrovia City Mayor, Mary Broh, and apologized to members of the National Muslim Council after Broh and members of her task force were involved in a scuffle with Muslims at a mosque in Monrovia on August 29 in which several persons were assaulted and properties damaged. The task force attempted to remove stalls near the mosque that were erected for the celebration of Ramadan. Broh's task force has received praise by many for its efforts to clean up the city, and President Sirleaf has viewed Broh as a positive force for change. However, these actions have given Broh's detractors an opening to criticize her brashness in enforcing municipal laws, so President Sirleaf had to respond quickly to quell the controversy. END SUMMARY.

2. (U) According to press accounts, Acting Mayor of Monrovia Mary Broh led her Special Presidential Task Force (Ref A) to clean up around the Benson Street Mosque, just as Muslim worshippers were setting up stalls of food along the sidewalk in preparation for the breaking of fast. A scuffle ensued, and the Liberia National Police was called in to restore order.

3. (U) President Sirleaf promptly took steps to calm the situation by issuing a formal apology on August 30 and ordered the immediate dissolution of the task force. Then, on September 1, she personally visited the Benson Street Mosque in Monrovia along with Broh, and both apologized to the Muslim community. Broh resolved to work more closely with Muslim leaders in her efforts to clean up the city.

4. (U) Mary Broh was appointed to head a Special Presidential Task Force to clean up Monrovia in February. Before its dissolution, the task force undertook some commendable steps to beautify Monrovia by creating flower parks, painting sidewalks and street corners, and clearing street peddlers who contributed to the city's frequent traffic jams. The task force also removed daily piles of garbage using trucks and bulldozers from the streets of Monrovia.

5. (SBU) The cleanup campaign has not been without controversy. Broh and the task force have been accused of indiscriminately destroying properties and aggression against citizens in the name of cleaning up the city of Monrovia. The demolition of several squatter communities in and around Monrovia has drawn criticism from some Monroviaans and opposition politicians. The task force has clashed with residents in several parts of Monrovia, but the scuffle with Muslims on August 29 threatened to bring religious tensions back to the fore. Muslim leaders had threatened to use their followers to get even with Broh and the task force before Sirleaf calmed the situation.

6. (SBU) COMMENT. The prompt action by President Sirleaf to apologize to Muslims for the incident is an indication that religious tolerance is a sensitive and serious issue in Liberia. The dissolution of the Presidential task force despite its many achievements also indicates the seriousness that President Sirleaf attaches to issues of religious discontent. However, it appears that Sirleaf remains solidly behind her Acting Mayor, despite Broh's insensitive actions. The incident will also harden the position of members of the Senate who are against the confirmation of Mary Broh

as Mayor of Monrovia (Ref A).

ROBINSON